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Diplomatic Background of Munich Accord

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NO sooner had Britain, France, Germany and Italy concluded the Munich accord than public opinion throughout the world, having recovered from its initial feeling of relief, divided sharply on the merits of the settlement. Acclaimed by some as the first step toward European appeasement, it was denounced by others as the most flagrant betrayal in history, merely postponing a general war. While it is as yet impossible to write a definitive diplomatic history of the Munich accord, certain general conclusions may already be reached on the basis of available information.¹

1. As early as the first week in May 1938, and possibly earlier, Mr. Chamberlain had come to the conclusion that a Central European crisis, in which Britain might become involved because of its alliance with France, could be averted only by eventual cession of the predominantly German areas of Sudetenland. His principal endeavor henceforth was to persuade the Prague government to accept this drastic solution, and meanwhile prevent Hitler from occupying the disputed territory by force. Mr. Chamberlain believed—and in this he probably reflected a large majority of British opinion—that the Sudeten issue, implying as it did denial of self-determination to Germans, was not sufficiently clear-cut to justify war in the eyes of the British people, least of all in the Dominions, which at the 1937 Imperial Conference had urged Britain to conciliate potential aggressors in Europe. The Prime Minister believed that, in case war could not be averted, he would stand a much better chance of obtaining the aid of the Dominions, and possibly the United States, if he could demonstrate that all possibilities of conciliation had been exhausted.

2. While the British Cabinet presented an outwardly united front during the Czechoslovak crisis, the resignation of Alfred Duff Cooper, First Lord of the Admiralty, immediately after Mr. Chamberlain's re-

1. Internal developments in Czechoslovakia during the crisis are discussed in "Partition of Czechoslovakia," by Paul B. Taylor, *Foreign Policy Reports*, November 15, 1938.

turn from Munich, and the rumored opposition of several other Ministers to the Munich settlement, indicate that the Cabinet was divided on this critical issue. Many observers also believe that the advice of Foreign Office experts like Sir Robert Vansittart, Sir Alexander Cadogan and others was disregarded by Mr. Chamberlain, who charted his own course with the assistance of an inner Cabinet—composed of Sir John Simon, Sir Samuel Hoare and Lord Halifax—and of Sir Horace Wilson, his adviser on industrial affairs, who had had no previous diplomatic experience.

3. The French government had repeatedly declared, following Germany's annexation of Austria, that it would faithfully fulfill its treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia. Several members of the Cabinet, however, notably M. Bonnet—supported by a large section of the press—searched, after Hitler's Nuremberg speech, for a loophole which might justify termination of France's obligations to Czechoslovakia. M. Bonnet and his supporters questioned France's military preparedness, expressed doubts regarding the economic and military strength of the Soviet Union, and minimized the value of various moves after Godesberg indicating that Britain would come to France's aid in case of war over Czechoslovakia.

4. The parliaments of France and Britain were not consulted by their governments during the crisis, and were summoned after September 30 merely to ratify a *fait accompli*. While this procedure may appear necessary when democratic states are faced with an external emergency, its effects on the future of parliamentary democracy were regarded by some observers with profound misapprehension.

5. The governing circles of both France and Britain were susceptible to the ideas, publicized by Hitler, that communism was a threat to European civilization;² that war would precipitate social revolution, which would spell the doom of capitalism and redound to the interest of the Soviet Union; and that the U.S.S.R., because of economic disorganization and the recent army purge, was not prepared to give effective aid to Czechoslovakia. These arguments seemed confirmed by the judgment of observers like Colonel Lindbergh and General Vuillemin, who were im-

2. Cf. for example, the Marquess of Londonderry, *Ourselves and Germany* (London, Robert Hale, 1938).

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pressed by Germany's air force, and whose opinion offered a convenient justification for inaction in the Czechoslovak crisis.

It would be impossible, however, to assert that Left groups in France and Britain were unanimously hostile to the Munich settlement. Many of them—especially among French Socialists and syndicalists—were pacifists by conviction, opposed war, and favored a policy of reconciliation with Germany. The French Communist party was the only Left group which consistently advocated resistance to Hitler's demands.³

6. The French and British people were deeply anxious to avoid war, but stoically endured the suspense of the crisis, and allowed themselves to be mobilized with little or no sign of defeatism, which was much more noticeable in the press than among the public generally. The Italians, already wearied by the Ethiopian and Spanish campaigns, were reluctant to fight on the side of Germany which, despite official boasts regarding the strength of the Rome-Berlin axis, remained unpopular in Italy. The Germans, although assailed by violent anti-Czech propaganda, displayed no enthusiasm for war, but were kept in ignorance of diplomatic developments, and were led to believe that the worst eventuality would be a lightning war with Czechoslovakia, from which they thought Germany could not but emerge victorious.

7. The Soviet government, in answer to inquiries from Paris and Prague, repeatedly declared that it would come to the aid of Czechoslovakia in accordance with the Czech-Soviet pact of 1935, which provided for simultaneous assistance by France within the framework of the League of Nations. Strategic difficulties, however, made an accurate estimate of Soviet aid a matter of hypothesis. Soviet troops could have reached Prague only by passing through Poland, which was hostile to the Soviet Union, or through Rumania, which had not yet granted permission for their passage, awaiting the decision of France and Britain. The only effective aid Russia could have immediately rendered Prague was to have sent airplanes, whose flight over Rumanian territory had already been tacitly permitted by Bucharest.

These strategic difficulties were known when France and Czechoslovakia concluded their pacts of mutual assistance with the U.S.S.R. in 1935. The situation, however, was altered to the disadvantage of Prague and Moscow by Germany's remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1936, and the subsequent construction of the Siegfried Line of fortifications, matching the French Maginot Line. In this sense, remilitarization of the Rhineland may be said to have sealed the fate of Czechoslovakia—although in September the French General Staff apparently considered the possibility of delivering a blow at Germany from the south by invading Italy.

8. Mussolini was disturbed by the annexation of Austria, and by growing Nazi influence in Eastern

3. Raymond Millet, "La Politique extérieure divise les Partis d'extrême-gauche et les Milieux syndicalistes," *L'Europe Nouvelle*, October 15, 1938, p. 1112.

Europe and the Balkans, which he had once considered Italy's sphere of interest. During the Czechoslovak crisis he supported the claims of Poland and Hungary in the hope that, if these two countries obtained a common frontier, they would constitute a more reliable line of defense against German expansion than Czechoslovakia which, in his opinion, was undermined by minority conflicts and Soviet influence. Despite bellicose speeches, *Il Duce* apparently feared a general war; hoped that, if worst came to worst, the conflict could be localized; and saw in the crisis an opportunity to conclude the Western four-power pact he had first proposed in 1933, soon after Hitler had become Chancellor.

9. Hitler intended not only to obtain territorial revision through Sudeten "self-determination," but to destroy the military and economic power of Czechoslovakia, thus opening the way to German domination of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. His attack on communism expressed, in reality, Germany's fear of a new form of Pan-Slavism, in which Czechoslovakia, instead of Serbia, would serve as the instrument for Russia's policy of blocking German expansion to the East.

Hitler was probably sincere when he told Mr. Chamberlain at Berchtesgaden that he was prepared to risk a general war to obtain the Sudetenland—first, because he did not believe that Czechoslovakia would yield to his demands without fighting, and second because he was convinced that German "intervention" in Czechoslovakia would not precipitate a general war. Herr von Ribbentrop and M. Flandin, former French Premier, had persuaded Nazi leaders that France would not fulfill its obligations to Prague and, even if it did, that Britain would not intervene in Central Europe. Under these circumstances, Hitler did not think he was running any risk in presenting demands which, according to his own statement at Godesberg, he never expected France, Britain and Czechoslovakia to accept.

10. Czechoslovakia, handicapped by the presence within its borders of several militant national minorities which received support from their respective homelands across the border, would have found it difficult to resist Hitler's demands unless it was certain of French, British and Soviet aid. Perhaps the greatest disservice rendered by France to Czechoslovakia was its failure to make it clear that, in a showdown with Germany, it would not come to the aid of Prague. Had this been done, the Prague government might have made timely concessions both to its national minorities and to neighboring countries, thus strengthening itself against external aggression. Lacking assurance of French and Soviet support, Prague might possibly have come to terms even with Hitler—although it may be doubted, in view of Hitler's desire to destroy Czech military resistance once and for all, that such terms would eventually have proved more favorable to Czechoslovakia than those imposed at Munich.

11. The United States, despite the attempts of Con-

gress to formulate a foolproof policy of neutrality, did not remain neutral during the Czechoslovak crisis, when American public opinion displayed an unmistakably anti-German trend. While declining any responsibility for European negotiations, President Roosevelt, with the approval of a majority of the American people, urged all interested governments to persevere in their efforts to avert war—although he could not have foreseen the terms on which peace would be finally secured. His two appeals—the first of which was published in Germany two days after its delivery to Hitler, while the second was withheld until after Munich—produced a favorable impression in France and Britain. It seems probable, however, that Hitler's sudden realization after Godesberg that the tide might turn toward a general war, which he had not anticipated, was the determining factor in his decision to summon the Munich conference.

THE EFFECTS OF ANSCHLUSS

The Czechoslovak problem, which had preoccupied European chancelleries since Hitler's rise to power, was given immediate urgency by the Austro-German union proclaimed on March 12. The second Cabinet of M. Blum, formed during the week-end when German troops were occupying Austria, reaffirmed France's determination to fulfill the obligations of its treaties with Czechoslovakia. Mr. Chamberlain, however, speaking in the House of Commons on March 24, declined to pledge Britain to assist Czechoslovakia in case of attack, or to support France if it carried out the terms of its Czechoslovak alliance. Such a pledge, he said, could not be given "in relation to an area" where Britain's vital interests "are not concerned in the same degree as they are in the case of France and Belgium." At the same time, he indicated that Britain might intervene as a League member "for the restoration of peace or the maintenance of international order," and stressed that, "where peace and war are concerned, legal obligations are not alone involved."⁴

Meanwhile, in France, a section of the press was beginning to raise doubts regarding the validity of France's obligations toward Czechoslovakia. This point of view was explicitly developed in *Le Temps* by Joseph-Barthélémy, who asked whether, to preserve Czechoslovakia, that "political aggregation of several nationalities," it was necessary to kill three million Frenchmen, and answered "with pain, but with firmness: no!" In his opinion, France's treaties with Czechoslovakia, concluded within the framework of the League Covenant and the Locarno

4. Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons (London, H.M. Stationery Office, 1938), Fifth Series, Vol. 333, p. 1046.

treaties, lost their validity when the League became impotent and Germany denounced Locarno.⁵

This view was apparently shared by M. Bonnet, French Foreign Minister,⁶ who with Premier Daladier participated in a conference with the British Ministers in London on April 28 and 29. At this conference, however, M. Daladier succeeded in impressing the British Ministers—including Mr. Chamberlain—with the seriousness of the Central European situation. The communiqué issued at the close of the conference revealed that Britain and France had perfected the defensive Western alliance they had been developing since March 1936 when, following Hitler's reoccupation of the Rhineland, the two countries agreed to hold consultations between their general staffs. This alliance established far closer collaboration, both in the matter of armed forces and military supplies, than had existed before 1914. The British, however, were not ready to go beyond Mr. Chamberlain's statement of March 24, and once more recommended concessions by Prague to the Sudeten Germans. The compromise finally reached was that Britain and France would separately use their influence in Berlin, Warsaw and Prague to urge satisfactory solution of Czechoslovakia's minority problems which, according to the British, had to precede further political and economic commitments. If the Nazis continued to be truculent, Britain and France agreed jointly to warn Germany that war with Czechoslovakia might lead to a general conflict.⁷

The first week in May Mr. Chamberlain discussed the Czechoslovak situation at a private luncheon given by Lady Astor for a group of American correspondents. The Prime Minister then apparently believed that Czechoslovakia could not survive in its existing form. He was consequently convinced that, to avoid resort to force, the Prague government should promptly make concessions to Germany. He already thought at this time that frontier revision might be preferable to cantonal autonomy. The revision he envisaged was cession of a "fringe" of territory to Germany which, according to him, would transform Czechoslovakia into a smaller, but sounder, state.⁸

On May 12 Konrad Henlein, leader of the Sudeten German party, paid a surprise visit to London,

5. Joseph-Barthélémy, "Tribune Libre: Conscience Angoissée," *Le Temps*, April 12, 1938.

6. Joseph-Barthélémy's arguments were used by M. Bonnet in his speech at the Radical Socialist Congress in Marseilles on October 29, 1938. *Ibid.*, October 30, 1938.

7. *The Times* (London), and *New York Times*, April 30, 1938.

8. Joseph Driscoll, *New York Herald Tribune*, May 14, 1938. Cf. also Augur, *New York Times*, May 14, 1938.

where he interviewed not only government officials but opponents of concessions to Germany, notably Winston Churchill and Sir Robert Vansittart. This visit coincided with action in Berlin by the British Ambassador, Sir Nevile Henderson, who expressed the hope that the Sudeten question would be settled without resort to force. Backed by France—which in return for the Anglo-French defensive alliance was expected to use its influence for appeasement in Eastern Europe—Britain urged Prague to make all concessions “compatible with the security of the state,” but declined to guarantee military aid.

Over the week-end of May 21, Europe was alarmed by rumors of German troop movements in the direction of the Czechoslovak border. In the night of May 20 the Prague Cabinet summoned one class of reserves and deputy reserves, plus specialist troops from many classes, for “extraordinary manoeuvres”—thus avoiding formal mobilization. During the resulting war-scare, France reiterated its intention to fulfill its treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia, but urged Prague to grant concessions to the Sudeten Germans. The British made strong representations against war both in Prague and Berlin. In his Nuremberg speech of September 12, Hitler denied that unusual troop movements had taken place in May. He stated, however, that since “a great power cannot accept a second time such a mean assault,” he had ordered on May 29 expansion of the army and air force and completion of Germany’s western fortifications. The May crisis, which demonstrated Czechoslovakia’s determination to defend itself if threatened with the fate of Austria, apparently convinced Hitler that Prague could not be brought to accept his terms except by war or serious threat of war.⁹

On July 18, on the eve of the British sovereigns’ visit to Paris, Hitler’s personal emissary, Captain Wiedemann, called on Lord Halifax, British Foreign Secretary. Captain Wiedemann expressed the regret of the German government that negotiations for settlement of the Sudeten issue were making such slow progress, and its hope for improvement in Anglo-German relations.¹⁰ Following conversations in Paris between Lord Halifax and the French Ministers, Mr. Chamberlain announced in the House of Commons on July 26 that Lord Runciman, a Conservative, would be sent to Czechoslovakia as “adviser” to investigate the situation and, if possible, mediate between the two parties.¹¹

9. For details of the May 21 crisis, cf. Taylor, “Partition of Czechoslovakia,” cited.

10. “From Our Diplomatic Correspondent,” *The Times*, July 20, 1938.

11. *Ibid.*, July 26, 27, 1938.

WAITING FOR THE CRISIS

While Lord Runciman was wrestling with the Sudeten problem, the German government, early in August, announced extensive army manoeuvres to begin on August 15 and continue until after the Nazi Party Congress at Nuremberg, and various measures empowering the military authorities to requisition civilian goods and services. These developments, according to Mr. Chamberlain, “could not fail to be regarded abroad as equivalent to partial mobilization and . . . suggested the German government was determined to find a settlement of the Sudeten question by autumn.”¹²

Sir Nevile Henderson, British Ambassador in Berlin, was instructed by the middle of August to point out to the German government that these military measures “could not fail to destroy all chance of successful mediation by Lord Runciman’s mission, perhaps endanger the peace of all great powers in Europe,” and end the prospects for resumption of Anglo-German conversations.¹³ In his reply, Herr von Ribbentrop refused to discuss military measures, and “referred to the expressed opinion that the British efforts in Prague had only served to increase Czech intransigence.”¹⁴

Britain’s answer was delivered by Sir John Simon, Chancellor of the Exchequer, at Lanark, Scotland, on August 27.¹⁵ Avoiding any direct reference to Germany and leaving the way open for negotiations with the totalitarian states, Sir John reaffirmed Mr. Chamberlain’s statement of March 24 that Britain would probably become involved in a Central European war. This declaration coincided with the announcement on August 26 that a great part of the British Home Fleet would leave English Channel ports on September 6, the opening day of the Nuremberg Congress, for manoeuvres north of Scotland, to continue until November.

Meanwhile, Sir Nevile Henderson had been recalled to London on August 30 for consultation with the Cabinet. He returned the next day to Berlin, and gave Herr von Kreitner, State Secretary of the German Foreign Office, “a strong personal warning” regarding the probable attitude of the British government in the event of German aggression against Czechoslovakia, “particularly if France were compelled to intervene.” On September 1 Sir Nevile, during an interview with Ribbentrop, re-

12. Speech of Mr. Chamberlain in the House of Commons, September 28, 1938, Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons (London, H.M. Stationery Office, 1938), Vol. 339, No. 160, p. 6.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. *The Times*, August 28, 1938.

peated "as a personal but most urgent message" the warning he had delivered the previous day.¹⁶

Reports from Berlin indicated that the Führer found it difficult to believe that the British "would go to war to prevent the Sudeten Germans from exercising the right of self-determination."¹⁷ This opinion reflected the advice of Ribbentrop who, as Ambassador to London, had frequented British circles favorable to reconciliation with Nazi Germany. The French Foreign Office, following its routine practice in such incidents, stressed the necessity of making it clear to Hitler what Britain would do in case of German attack on Czechoslovakia. Mr. Chamberlain, however, did not want to take the risk "of further aggravating the situation by any formal representations which might have been interpreted by the German government as a public rebuff," as had been the case during the May 21 crisis.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Sir Nevile Henderson, who attended the Nuremberg Congress, "took every opportunity to impress upon the leading German personalities"—among them Ribbentrop, Goering, Hess and Himmler—the attitude of the British government as expressed on March 24 and August 27; and it was decided by the British Cabinet "to make personal representations to the Chancellor himself,"¹⁹ although Sir Nevile did not obtain an interview with Hitler.

The French government had taken the precaution on September 5 of recalling a number of reservists, particularly technicians, to bring the Maginot Line forts up to their full strength. On September 4 M. Bonnet, speaking in Pointe de Grave at the unveiling of a monument commemorating the entrance of the United States into the World War, had declared that France, "at all events," would remain faithful to all its pacts and treaties.²⁰ This speech was well received by the French press, and the people displayed a measure of *sang-froid* in the face of the impending crisis for which they were praised by M. Daladier on September 5.

At this decisive moment Nazi extremists received unexpected (or possibly expected) support from the London *Times*, which in its leading article of September 7 advanced the idea that the Sudeten Germans "do not find themselves at ease within the Czechoslovak Republic."²¹ In that case, said the *Times*, "it might be worth while for the Czechoslovak government to consider whether they

should exclude altogether the project, which has found favor in some quarters [presumably British], of making Czechoslovakia a more homogeneous state by the secession of that fringe of alien populations who are contiguous to the nation with which they are united by race. In any case the wishes of the population concerned would seem to be a decisively important element in any solution that can hope to be regarded as permanent, and the advantages to Czechoslovakia of becoming a homogeneous state might conceivably outweigh the obvious disadvantages of losing the Sudeten German districts of the borderland." The *Times* article, promptly disavowed by the British Foreign Office, not unnaturally "aroused the greatest interest" in Germany.²² Italy, while outwardly supporting Germany's claims to the Sudetenland, showed a more moderate attitude than the London *Times*. The semi-official *Informazione Diplomatica* on September 8 supported Henlein's Karlsbad program on the ground that it called for territorial autonomy, but not for "separation pure and simple" from Czechoslovakia.²³ Meanwhile, a non-resistance campaign had been launched by several Paris newspapers, notably *La République*,²⁴ *Le Matin* and *Le Jour*, all of which declared that the Sudeten issue was a domestic question which should not be allowed to provoke an international conflict.

While the French Foreign Office still feared Britain had not made its position sufficiently clear, the British Cabinet believed that its views had "now been conveyed fully to the proper quarter."²⁵ This impression was strengthened by reports that Field Marshal Goering, in spite of a violent speech on September 10, had urged Hitler to adopt a moderate course—advice which was apparently ill-received, and resulted in Goering's absence from Nuremberg on September 12, ostensibly for reasons of health. German army leaders, too, opposed the use of force—notably General Ludwig Beck, Chief of Staff, who resigned on October 31.²⁶

On September 9 the British Cabinet decided to take precautionary naval measures, including the commissioning of mine-layers and mine-sweepers; and on September 11, the day before Hitler's Nuremberg speech, Mr. Chamberlain, in a statement to the press, emphasized the close ties uniting Britain and France "in the probability in certain eventualities of this country going to the assistance

16. Mr. Chamberlain's speech of September 28, 1938.

17. Dispatch from Berlin, *The Times*, September 1, 1938.

18. Mr. Chamberlain's speech of September 28, 1938.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Le Temps*, September 5, 1938.

21. "Nuremberg and Aussig," *The Times*, September 7, 1938.

22. Dispatch from Berlin, *ibid.*, September 9, 1938.

23. Dispatch from Rome, *ibid.*

24. M. Emile Roche, editor of *La République*, is a close friend of M. Bonnet.

25. "From Our Diplomatic Correspondent," *The Times*, September 12, 1938.

26. *L'Europe Nouvelle*, October 8, 1938.

of France.²⁷ The French Foreign Office, in an ambiguous statement to certain Paris journalists, minimized the importance of Mr. Chamberlain's statement, and once more expressed the hope that other steps might be taken to clarify Britain's attitude on Czechoslovakia.²⁸ In the British Cabinet, however, "the argument was used that what had been intended to deter might instead contrive to provoke," and at the Cabinet meeting of September 12 it was decided that "no further action could usefully be taken" before Hitler's speech that evening.²⁹ Meanwhile, the German Ambassador in Paris had been warned by M. Bonnet on September 7 that France would fulfill its treaty obligations should Czechoslovakia be attacked, and a similar warning had been given to the German military attaché by General Gamelin, Chief of the French General Staff.³⁰

In spite of British and French warnings and precautionary measures, the impression still persisted in Berlin that, if the Reich went to the assistance of the Sudeten Germans, this would constitute no more than "intervention," and would not be an invasion setting into motion the mechanism of Franco-Soviet aid to Czechoslovakia and British aid to France.³¹

Hitler's anxiously awaited speech of September 12 did little to ease European tension.³² Contrary to the expectations of extreme pessimists, the Führer refrained from irrevocably committing Germany to war on behalf of the Sudeten Germans. But neither did he hold out any hope of appeasement so long as the Sudetens remained within the boundaries of Czechoslovakia. The only concrete point in Hitler's speech was his emphasis on the right of Sudeten Germans to self-determination, which indicated that he might demand a plebiscite.

The Czechoslovak Minister in London, Jan Masaryk, had already warned the British government on September 12 that a plebiscite would be unacceptable to Prague because it would endanger the security of the republic.³³ On September 13, following a series of riots in the Sudetenland timed to coincide with the Nuremberg speech, the Prague government proclaimed martial law in several

Sudeten German districts. The Henlein party immediately presented an ultimatum demanding repeal of martial law, which the Czechoslovak Cabinet refused to consider on the ground that a political party could not dictate to the government. Negotiations between Prague and the Sudeten Germans were broken off; Lord Runciman, considering his mission at an end, returned to London; and by September 14 German troops were concentrated on the Czechoslovak frontier, ostensibly to prevent further incidents in the Sudetenland, "although reliable reports indicated order had been completely restored."³⁴ Britain feared that a German invasion might bring into operation France's pledge to assist Czechoslovakia, and thus precipitate a European war, in which it might "well have been involved in support of France." During the night of September 13 to 14 M. Daladier telephoned Mr. Chamberlain, and stressed the value of substituting direct encounters between responsible statesmen for diplomatic notes and démarches.³⁵ Mr. Chamberlain, who shared this view, decided to put into effect a plan he had had in mind "for a considerable period as a last resort." Believing that one of the principal difficulties in dealing with totalitarian governments was lack of any means of establishing contacts with the responsible leaders, he decided to have a personal interview with Hitler, and find out "whether there was any hope yet of saving peace."³⁶ Hitler responded to this suggestion "with cordiality," and on September 15 Mr. Chamberlain went by airplane to Munich, and from there by train to Hitler's mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden.

Announcement of Mr. Chamberlain's visit was greeted with intense relief in Britain, as well as in Germany. But on the eve of Mr. Chamberlain's arrival at Berchtesgaden, Henlein, who had hitherto discussed only cantonal autonomy and the possibility of a plebiscite, issued a proclamation declaring the German and Czech populations could no longer live side by side in the same state, and that the Sudeten Germans now wanted to "go home to the Reich." The Italian press, too, adopted a firmer tone, and on September 13 *Informazione Diplomatica* stated that there were only two alternatives—to give the Sudeten Germans the means to determine their own future, or to deny them that right, precipitating confusion and war.³⁷

In France, meanwhile, the ground was being

27. Mr. Chamberlain's speech of September 28, 1938, cited; also *New York Times*, September 29, 1938.

28. "Autour d'une Capitulation," *L'Europe Nouvelle*, October 8, 1938, p. 1087.

29. Mr. Chamberlain's speech of September 28, 1938.

30. Dispatch from Berlin, *The Times*, September 9, 1938.

31. "From Our Diplomatic Correspondent," *ibid.*, September 12, 1938.

32. For English text, cf. *The Times* and *New York Times*, September 13, 1938.

33. *The Times*, September 13, 1938.

34. Mr. Chamberlain's speech of September 28, 1938.

35. Speech of M. Daladier in the Chamber of Deputies, October 4, 1938, France, *Débats Parlementaires*, Chambre des Députés, 16e Législature, Session Extraordinaire de 1938, 1re Séance, *Journal Officiel*, October 5, 1938, p. 1526.

36. Mr. Chamberlain's speech of September 28, 1938.

37. *Corriere della Sera*, September 14, 1938.

rapidly cleared for acceptance of Hitler's Berchtesgaden demands. The French Cabinet, meeting in the afternoon of September 12, before the Nuremberg speech, still displayed an outwardly firm attitude.³⁸ In a long conference following this Cabinet session, M. Daladier, Minister of National Defense as well as Prime Minister, discussed emergency military measures with General Gamelin, Inspector General of the Army.³⁹ During this conference, General Gamelin, expressed his confidence in the efficiency of the French army, and his belief that, since Germany would be unable to win a decisive victory by a short war, France, better equipped than the Reich for prolonged conflict, would emerge as the final victor. This opinion was contradicted by General Vuillemin, a non-career man, Chief of Staff of the French air force, who had been profoundly impressed with the performance of German airplanes displayed to him by Field Marshal Goering in July.⁴⁰ The Paris correspondent of the *London Times* reported on September 13 that, while no trace of the unthinking enthusiasm of 1914 was apparent in Paris, "the entire nation is clearly in no mind to fall into the opposite extreme of nerveless gloom."

This mood was completely altered by Hitler's Nuremberg speech.⁴¹ At its meeting on September 13 the Cabinet split into two groups—a majority, led by MM. Bonnet, Chautemps and De Monzie, who advocated concessions, and a minority, composed of MM. Daladier, Reynaud, Mandel and Champtier de Ribes, supported by the presidents of the Senate and the Chamber, MM. Herriot and Jeanneney, who urged undiminished resistance to Hitler's demands.⁴² In a statement of September 14, M. Bonnet declared that the government wanted to leave every door to conciliation open, provided Prague gave its consent.⁴³ This view was echoed by all sections of the press, with the exception of nationalists like M. de Kerillis on the extreme Right, and Communists, notably Gabriel Péri, foreign editor of *L'Humanité*, on the extreme Left.

THE BERCHTESGADEN INTERVIEW

It was with full knowledge of France's internal situation that Mr. Chamberlain met Hitler at

38. *Le Temps* and *The Times*, September 13, 1938.

39. *Ibid.*

40. XXX, "L'Avis que les Chefs Militaires ont donné au Gouvernement Français," *L'Europe Nouvelle*, September 24, 1938.

41. *The Times*, September 15, 1938; Alexander Werth, "Cold Feet in Paris," *The New Statesman and Nation*, September 24, 1938, p. 445.

42. *The Times* and *Le Temps*, September 15, 1938.

43. *The Times*, September 15, 1938.

Berchtesgaden on September 15. During the first conversation, which lasted three hours, the British Prime Minister "very soon became aware that the situation was much more acute and much more urgent than [he] had realized."⁴⁴ Hitler, "in courteous but perfectly definite terms, stated he had made up his mind the Sudeten Germans must have the right of self-determination and of returning, if they wished, to the Reich. If they could not achieve this by their own efforts, he said, he would assist them to do so and he declared categorically that, rather than wait, he would be prepared to risk a world war."

So strongly did Chamberlain get the impression that Hitler was contemplating an immediate invasion of Czechoslovakia that, as he told the House of Commons on September 28, "I asked him why he had allowed me to travel all that way, since I evidently was wasting my time." Hitler answered that "if I could give him there and then the assurance the British government accepted the principle of self-determination, he was quite ready to discuss ways and means of carrying it out. If, on the contrary, I told him such a principle could not be considered by the British Government, then he agreed that it was no use to continue our conversation."

Mr. Chamberlain returned to London on September 16 convinced that his "visit alone prevented an invasion, for which everything had been prepared," and that, with German troops in the positions they then occupied, "nothing anybody could do would prevent an invasion unless the right of self-determination was granted, and that quickly, to the Sudeten Germans." And that, said Mr. Chamberlain, "was the sole hope of a peaceful solution."

THE ANGLO-FRENCH PROPOSALS

Immediately following Mr. Chamberlain's return, a Cabinet meeting was held on Saturday morning, September 17, with the participation of Lord Runciman, who had come back from Prague at the Prime Minister's request. Lord Runciman informed the Cabinet that, although in his opinion responsibility for the final breach in the Prague negotiations rested on Sudeten extremists, nevertheless, in view of recent developments on the frontier, "the districts between Czechoslovakia and Germany where the Sudeten population is in an important majority should be given the full right of self-determination at once. He considered the cession of the territories to be inevitable and

44. The account of the Chamberlain-Hitler negotiations, unless otherwise noted, is based on Mr. Chamberlain's speech of September 28, 1938.

thought it should be done promptly." In other areas containing German inhabitants, local autonomy should be established on the lines of Czechoslovakia's Fourth Plan. The Prague government, moreover, should terminate its alliances with France and the Soviet Union, and adopt a neutral policy in foreign affairs, like that of Switzerland.⁴⁵

Following this Cabinet meeting, it was decided to invite MM. Daladier and Bonnet to London for consultation regarding Hitler's Berchtesgaden proposals. The Czechoslovak Prime Minister, Dr. Hodza, declared on September 18 that "the so-called plebiscite" could in no circumstances assure "peaceful and constructive collaboration" in Europe.⁴⁶ This statement hardened the attitude of Berlin, which already believed that Prague would never accept a plebiscite and staked all on war, hoping to hold out long enough to involve France, Britain and Russia in a general conflict.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, Premier Mussolini, speaking at Trieste on September 18, demanded a "radical, totalitarian" solution of the Czechoslovak problem by "plebiscites for all the nationalities which want them," adding that, if a front were formed either for or against Prague, "Italy knows on which side she will be."⁴⁸ The Italian press, however, continued to hope that the conflict would either be settled or localized and did not anticipate a general war.

At the all-day conference held by French and British Ministers in London on Sunday, September 18, M. Bonnet, in answer to British questions regarding France's military preparedness, apparently stressed a section of General Gamelin's report pointing out the weakness of French aviation, while leaving out another section emphasizing the quality of the French army. The Anglo-French proposals adopted as a result of this conference embodied the principal recommendations submitted by Lord Runciman to the British Cabinet on September 16.⁴⁹ The French and British governments were convinced that, "after recent events, the point has now been reached where the further maintenance within the boundaries of the Czechoslovak state of the districts mainly inhabited by Sudeten Germans cannot, in fact, continue any longer without imperiling the interests of Czechoslovakia herself and of European peace." Both governments were consequently "compelled to the conclusion that the maintenance of peace and the safety of

Czechoslovakia's vital interests cannot effectively be assured unless these areas are now transferred to the Reich, either by direct transfer or as the result of a plebiscite." In view of the difficulties which might be created by a plebiscite, they anticipated, "in the absence of indication to the contrary," that Czechoslovakia might prefer to settle the Sudeten problem by the method of direct transfer, "and as a case by itself"—apparently drawing a distinction between the claims of Germany and Poland or Hungary.

In the absence of an official text of the Anglo-French proposals, which were not published as a British White Paper until September 28, the phrase "mainly inhabited by Sudeten Germans" was interpreted by the press in Britain and other countries as covering areas inhabited by a population from 70 to 75 per cent German; and an effort was subsequently made to prove that, at Munich, France and Britain were forced by Hitler to accept territorial terms in excess of those formulated at London. This contention is supported by the text of the Anglo-French proposals, which were distinctly more favorable to Czechoslovakia than the Godesberg memorandum or the Munich accord. These proposals provided for the transfer to Germany of "areas with over 50 per cent of German inhabitants"—presumably on the basis of the Czech 1930 census, not on the basis of the Austro-Hungarian census of 1910 which was applied after Munich. "Where circumstances render it necessary," frontiers might be adjusted by some international body, including a Czech representative; this body might also be charged with questions of possible exchange of population. A territorial counter-offer from Prague was barred in advance by the French and British governments, which declared they "were satisfied that the transfer of smaller areas based on a higher percentage would not meet the case."

The two governments recognized that, if Prague concurred in these proposals, it was entitled to ask for some assurance of its future security. The British government—yielding on this point to M. Daladier—was consequently "prepared to join in an international guarantee of the new boundaries of Czechoslovakia against unprovoked aggression," on one important condition: that this general guarantee should be substituted for "existing treaties which involve reciprocal obligations of a military character"—thus making it imperative for Prague to abandon its treaties with France and the Soviet Union. Mr. Chamberlain, however, regarded this "completely new commitment" as a substantial concession, because Britain was "not previously bound by any obligations toward Czechoslovakia other

45. *Ibid.*

46. *The Times*, September 19, 1938.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Corriere della Sera*, September 19, 1938.

49. "The Anglo-French Proposals presented to the Czechoslovak government on September 19, 1938," *Correspondence Regarding Czechoslovakia*, September 1938, cited, p. 8.

than those involved by the Covenant of the League.⁵⁰

The Anglo-French proposals carried a curt time-limit. The Prague government was asked to give its reply at the earliest possible moment, as Mr. Chamberlain "must resume conversations with Herr Hitler not later than Wednesday [September 21], and earlier if possible."

While the French and British Ministers were in conference on September 18, M. Masaryk had notified them that his government took it for granted it would be consulted before any decisions were reached, and could not accept any responsibility for proposals drafted without its participation.⁵¹ The Anglo-French proposals, presented without prior consultation with Prague, plunged the Czechs into grim despair.⁵² The Czechs felt they were confronted with two equally dangerous alternatives—a war in which they would not be sure of support by their allies, or dismemberment of their territory. Their fears were strengthened by the opinion, now openly expressed in Berlin, that German interests demanded not only cession of Sudetenland, but reduction of Czechoslovakia to military insignificance.⁵³

The French Cabinet met on September 19 in an atmosphere of bitterness and deep depression to hear the report of MM. Daladier and Bonnet on their London conversations. The Premier stressed the point that, while Britain did not dispute France's right to honor its treaty obligations toward Czechoslovakia, Mr. Chamberlain had made it "abundantly clear" that his government would not commit itself to give France military support unless French integrity was directly threatened. Under these circumstances, M. Daladier declared, it was the duty of the French government at least to support the presentation of the London proposals to Prague, although it was not ready to exercise more than "friendly pressure" on Dr. Benes. The Cabinet meeting revealed that, while a number of Ministers—notably MM. Reynaud, Mandel and Champetier de Ribes—considered the proposals as outrageous, "none of them was prepared to accept the responsibility for rejecting them outright."⁵⁴ French public opinion, as reflected by the press, accepted the Anglo-French proposals as "a deplorable and even a shameful necessity." This point of view was best expressed by M. Blum, who wrote in *Le Populaire* on September 20 that he was "divided between cowardly relief and shame."

50. Mr. Chamberlain's speech of September 28, 1938.

51. *The Times*, September 19, 1938.

52. *Ibid.*, September 20, 1938.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

The Prague government, without either accepting or rejecting the Anglo-French proposals, indicated in a note of September 20 that it might invoke the German-Czech treaty of arbitration of 1926 and submit the issue to the World Court at The Hague. By that time 22 German divisions were massed on the Czech frontier, the German press had adopted an increasingly violent tone toward Czechoslovakia, and the formation by Henlein of a Sudeten *Freikorps* on the German side of the frontier increased the perils of the situation. Early on Wednesday, September 21—the day originally set for Mr. Chamberlain's visit to Godesberg—the British and French governments addressed an urgent appeal to Prague for a more definite reply to their proposals, so that when the Prime Minister returned to Germany he would go "with a completely clear idea of where the Czechoslovak government stand."⁵⁵ Although M. Daladier, at the Cabinet meeting of September 19, had definitely assured his colleagues that France intended to use no more than "friendly pressure" on Prague, M. Bonnet, in the night of September 21, instructed the French Minister in Prague to inform the Czechoslovak government that, if it rejected the Anglo-French proposals, France would be unable to aid Czechoslovakia against German attack.⁵⁶ This démarche was apparently made without the consent of other members of the Cabinet. In protest, MM. Reynaud, Mandel and Champetier de Ribes presented their resignations to M. Daladier on September 22 but, in view of Mr. Chamberlain's impending visit to Godesberg, decided to remain in office for the time being.

Meanwhile, on September 19, the Czechoslovak government had formally asked the Soviet Union whether it was prepared to give immediate and effective assistance if France did likewise. In a speech to the League Assembly at Geneva on September 21 M. Litvinov said that his government "had

55. "From Our Diplomatic Correspondent," *The Times*, September 21, 1938.

56. Dispatch from Paris, *ibid.*, September 22, 1938. Fabre-Luce, citing a speech made by Emile Roche, editor of *La République*, suggests that President Benes welcomed French and British pressure because it provided him with an alibi for making concessions to Germany opposed by his own government. Alfred Fabre-Luce, *Histoire Secrète de la Conciliation de Munich* (Paris, Grasset, 1938), p. 57. Professor Henri Hauser of the Sorbonne categorically denies Benes was playing a "comedy," stating that the intervention of the French Minister in Prague should be described not as "pressure" but as an "ultimatum." Letter to *L'Europe Nouvelle*, November 12, 1938. For detailed versions of this démarche, cf. memorandum of Professor Seton-Watson, read in the British House of Commons by Dr. Hugh Dalton, Laborite, on October 3, 1938, Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, Vol. 339, No. 161, p. 142; and Hubert Beuve-Méry, "La Vérité sur la Pression Franco-Britannique exercée à Prague le 20 Septembre," *L'Europe Nouvelle*, October, 29, 1938, p. 1167.

given a clear answer in the affirmative." He also revealed that, after Hitler's Nuremberg speech, France had inquired about the attitude of the U.S.S.R. in case of an attack on Czechoslovakia. At that time he had "unambiguously" replied that the Soviet government intended to fulfill its obligations under the pact of mutual assistance in concert with France, and that the Soviet Commissariat of Defense was "ready immediately" to confer with French and Czech military representatives regarding appropriate measures.⁵⁷ Some observers believe—although no documentary proof is available on this point—that M. Bonnet conveyed a very different impression both to the British Ministers in London and to his Cabinet colleagues.⁵⁸

After two days of agonized discussion, the Czechoslovak government on September 21 unconditionally accepted the Anglo-French proposals "under the strongest pressure from Great Britain and France," adding only that it hoped the French and British governments would guarantee "the new frontiers during their formation."⁵⁹ This hope had already been dimmed by the savage outcry in the German press, which clamored for the destruction of Czechoslovakia, this "outpost of Bolshevism" in Central Europe.⁶⁰ According to the London *Times*, "the Czech government, Herr Hitler, and the British and French governments" were all agreed "on the principle and the method of the settlement. It only remains for the details to be decided and for good faith to be shown in putting them into effect."⁶¹

The working out of details was at this juncture complicated by the claims of Poland and Hungary, which demanded for their minorities treatment similar to that accorded the Sudeten Germans. To the representations made by Warsaw and Budapest, the British government replied that it was "concentrating its efforts on the Sudeten problem, on the solution of which the issue of war or peace in Europe depends," expressing the hope that the two Eastern European countries would do nothing to increase the difficulties of an already delicate situation.⁶² The German press, meanwhile, gave unstinted support to Polish and Hungarian claims, declaring that an international guarantee for "a rump Czechoslovakia in which all racial questions

are not settled by the same law is . . . a plan without foundation."⁶³

THE GODESBERG MEMORANDUM

Just as Henlein, on the eve of the Berchtesgaden interview, had sought to confront Mr. Chamberlain with a *fait accompli* by demanding self-determination, so on September 22, as the Prime Minister arrived at Godesberg, the Sudeten *Freikorps* crossed the frontier and occupied Eger, while the German press multiplied its efforts to demonstrate that "Red chaos" reigned in Czechoslovakia—an assertion described by the London *Times* as "propaganda in which lying has ceased to be even a fine art."⁶⁴

Mr. Chamberlain, determined above all to avoid resort to force, which might have involved Britain in the ensuing conflict, issued a communiqué at the close of his first conversation with Hitler appealing "most earnestly" to everybody to assist in maintaining "a state of orderliness" and "to refrain from action of any kind that would be likely to lead to incidents."⁶⁵ The Prime Minister thought he had only to discuss technical details regarding transfer of Sudeten territory and delimitation of the new frontier—neither of which, according to the London *Times*, could be "done in a hurry." He was consequently "shocked" when, at the beginning of the Thursday afternoon conversation, Hitler said the Anglo-French territorial proposals "were too dilatory and offered too many opportunities for evasion," and insisted that the areas subject to transfer should be immediately occupied by German troops, outlining the counter-proposals subsequently embodied in the so-called Godesberg memorandum, "except he did not in this conversation actually name any time limit." He also refused to participate in an international guarantee of Czechoslovakia's new frontiers until the claims of other minorities had been satisfied.⁶⁶

"The honorable members," Mr. Chamberlain told the House of Commons on September 28, "will realize the perplexity in which I found myself in being faced with this totally unexpected situation. I had been told at Berchtesgaden that, if the principle of self-determination were accepted, Herr Hitler would discuss with me ways and means of carrying it out. He told me afterward he never for one moment supposed I should be able to come back and say that the principle was accepted." The Prime Minister added he did not think Hitler was de-

57. League of Nations, *Verbatim Record of the Nineteenth Ordinary Session of the League of Nations*, Seventh Plenary Meeting, September 21, 1938, pp. 12-13.

58. Dispatch from Paris, *The Times*, September 23, 1938.

59. Dispatch from Prague, *ibid.*, September 22, 1938.

60. Dispatch from Berlin, *ibid.*

61. "The Second Visit," *ibid.*

62. Mr. Chamberlain's speech of September 28, 1938.

63. *Berliner Tageblatt*, September 23, 1938.

64. "Facing the Issue," *The Times*, September 24, 1938.

65. *Ibid.*, September 23, 1938.

66. Mr. Chamberlain's speech of September 28, 1938.

liberately deceiving him. From Mr. Chamberlain's own words, however, it would appear that Hitler had not expected that France and Britain, to say nothing of Czechoslovakia, would accept his Berchtesgaden proposals, and was even then prepared to use force to separate Sudetenland from the Czechoslovak state. When he found, to his surprise, that the French and British had forced Prague to accept the principle of self-determination, he pressed for its immediate realization. What shocked Mr. Chamberlain was not the actual substance of Hitler's demands—most of which had already been embodied in the Anglo-French proposals of September 19—but the method by which the Chancellor proposed to carry them out.

Feeling the need of further consideration, Mr. Chamberlain withdrew "full of foreboding" as to the success of his mission. In view of the difficulty of talking through the German interpreter, Paul Schmidt, and the fact he did not feel sure that what he had been saying had always been understood and appreciated by Hitler, Mr. Chamberlain thought it wise to set down on paper some comments on the German counter-proposals before resuming negotiations.

Shortly after breakfast on September 23 he sent a letter to Hitler expressing readiness to convey the Führer's proposals to Prague, but giving no indication that he would press the Czechs for an affirmative reply. The chief difficulty created by Hitler's proposals, he said, was the suggestion that the affected areas "should in the immediate future be occupied by German troops." An attempt "to occupy forthwith by German troops the areas which will become part of the Reich at once in principle and very shortly afterwards by formal delimitation, would be condemned as an unnecessary display of force."⁶⁷

In his reply, Hitler said the situation in the Sudetenland was "unbearable and will be terminated by me." What interested him was not recognition of the principle that Sudetenland was to go to Germany, "but solely the realization of this principle, and the realization which both puts an end in the shortest time to the sufferings of the unhappy victims of Czech tyranny, and at the same time corresponds to the dignity of a great power." He was compelled "to assume the insincerity of the Czech assurances so long as they are not implemented by practical proof." Only by the withdrawal of Czech troops and the occupation of the evacuated areas by German troops would the

67. "The First Letter of September 23, 1938, from the Prime Minister to the Reichs chancellor," *Correspondence regarding Czechoslovakia, September 1938*, cited, p. 10.

grounds for "forcible action" be removed. If Germany found it impossible to have the "clear rights" of Sudeten Germans accepted by way of negotiation, it was "determined to exhaust the other possibilities which then alone remained open to her."⁶⁸

To this note Mr. Chamberlain replied in his brief second letter of September 23 that, since Hitler maintained "entirely" the position he had taken the previous day, it was now "evidently" his duty, in his capacity as "intermediary," to transmit the Führer's proposals to the Czechoslovak government. He consequently requested Hitler to send him a memorandum setting forth these proposals, together with a map showing the area to be transferred subject to the results of the proposed plebiscite, which he intended to forward "at once" to Prague. Meanwhile, he asked for Hitler's assurance that no action would be taken by German troops "to prejudice any further mediation which may be found possible." Since acceptance or refusal of Hitler's terms was a matter for Czechoslovakia to decide, Mr. Chamberlain felt he could perform no further service by remaining at Godesberg, and proposed, "therefore, to return to England."⁶⁹

Meanwhile, Prague, in an appeal to London, had stressed the growing danger of the military situation. In reply to this appeal, and before the Godesberg terms were known outside Germany, the British Foreign Office sent fresh instructions to Mr. Newton, Minister in Prague. In accordance with these instructions, Mr. Newton and the French Minister, M. de Lacroix, informed the Czechoslovak Cabinet at 6:15 p.m. on September 23 that their governments—which had hitherto urged Prague not to envenom the situation by mobilizing—"could no longer take the responsibility of advising" Czechoslovakia for or against mobilization; but mobilization, if it took place, must be on Prague's own responsibility. They did not, as reported in Berlin, advise the Czechoslovak government to mobilize its troops.⁷⁰ Immediately after receipt of this Anglo-French statement—which was first disclosed in an official Prague broadcast of September 25—the Czechoslovak government ordered general mobilization.⁷¹

Following an extended conversation between Sir Nevile Henderson, Sir Horace Wilson and Herr von Ribbentrop, Mr. Chamberlain, in the presence of the three men, paid a farewell visit to Hitler which began at ten o'clock the night of September

68. "The Reichs chancellor to the Prime Minister," *ibid.*, p. 11.

69. "The Second Letter, September 23, 1938, from the Prime Minister to the Reichs chancellor," *ibid.*, p. 14.

70. "Mobilization of Czech Army: A Misleading Account," *The Times*, September 27, 1938.

71. *Ibid.*, September 26, 1938.

23, and lasted until the small hours of the morning. On this occasion Hitler presented the memorandum and map requested by the Prime Minister. "For the first time" Mr. Chamberlain found in the memorandum new proposals, "and spoke very frankly." He dwelt "with all the emphasis" at his command on the risks which would be incurred by German insistence on these terms. He declared that the language and manner of the document, which he described as an ultimatum rather than a memorandum, would profoundly shock public opinion in neutral countries, and "bitterly" reproached the Chancellor for his failure to respond in any way to the efforts he had made to secure peace. In spite of these frank words, the conversation, according to Mr. Chamberlain, was carried on in more friendly terms than that of September 22. Before taking leave of Hitler, Mr. Chamberlain had a few words with him in private. Hitler then declared that the Sudetenland was his last territorial ambition in Europe, and that he had no wish to include non-German peoples in the Third Reich.⁷²

The Godesberg memorandum⁷³ was accompanied by a map on which the Sudeten area to be ceded by Czechoslovakia, shaded in red, corresponded closely to the 50 per cent demarcation adopted in the Anglo-French proposals of September 19. The two documents differed not on the extent of territory to be ceded to Germany, but on the actual procedure of cession which, according to Hitler, "should be effected without any further delay." The Godesberg memorandum provided that the area designated on the map as German was to be occupied by German troops on Saturday, October 1, following the withdrawal of Czech armed forces, police, customs officials and frontier guards, without taking into account whether a plebiscite might prove that this or that part of the area had a Czech majority. The evacuated area was to be handed over in its "present condition"—that is "without destroying or rendering unusable in any way" military, economic and public utility establishments, including airports, gas works, wireless and power stations, and rolling stock. No foodstuffs, goods, cattle or raw materials were to be removed from the territory.

In certain areas—shaded in green on the Godesberg map—the German government agreed to permit a plebiscite before November 25, 1938, to be carried out under the control of an international commission. Only persons who resided in the areas in question on October 28, 1918, or were born there before that date, were to be eligible to vote. This provision automatically excluded many Czechs who had moved into the region after 1918.

72. Mr. Chamberlain's speech of September 28, 1938.

73. "Memorandum handed by the Reichschancellor to the Prime Minister on September 23, 1938 (with a Map)," *Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia, September 1938*, cited, p. 14.

The Czech government was to discharge at once all Sudeten Germans serving in its military forces or police, and to liberate all political prisoners of the German race.

Unlike the Anglo-French proposals, the Godesberg memorandum contained no plan for international guarantee of Czechoslovakia's new frontiers, although it left the country no hope of resisting or even surviving military aggression.

REACTION AGAINST GERMANY

Publication of the Godesberg terms produced an instant reaction against Germany in Britain and France. "If the memorandum admits of no answer but compliance," said the London *Times* on September 26, "the guillotine has fallen upon mediation and upon every hope of constructive diplomacy. Germany, granted the full satisfaction of racial claims and offered the procedure of equality, will have preferred deliberately to appeal to the sword." General Hertzog of South Africa asserted on September 25 that, if necessary, his government would carry out its obligations to the League of Nations "at any cost."⁷⁴ In Canada the opinion was gaining ground that if the British government should decide that Nazi aggression must be resisted by force of arms, Canada would range itself with other nations of the empire; and this view was shared by French Canadians, shocked by Hitler's persecution of the Catholic church.⁷⁵

Even more pronounced was the reaction in France. The French Cabinet, meeting in the afternoon of Sunday, September 25—just before MM. Daladier and Bonnet left for London—unanimously decided that the Godesberg memorandum must be resisted at all cost. This decision reflected a complete shift in the views of both the press and the French people generally, which over the weekend had "regained every whit of its courage and dignity in the hour of danger."⁷⁶ On Saturday, September 24, certain categories of reservists had been recalled, and this "pre-general mobilization" had been carried out in a spirit of grim, but calm determination.

Meanwhile, the Godesberg memorandum had been delivered to the Prague government on September 25 by Colonel Mason-MacFarlane, British military attaché. The Czechoslovak government, in a note submitted by M. Masaryk in London, replied on the same day that it had accepted the Anglo-French proposals on the understanding that they represented "the end of demands" to be made

74. *The Times*, September 26, 1938.

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*

on it, and that the two Western powers would guarantee the country's new frontiers in case of "felonious attack." The Godesberg memorandum, it declared, was "a *de facto* ultimatum of the sort usually presented to a vanquished nation and not a proposition to a sovereign state which has shown the greatest possible readiness to make sacrifices for the appeasement of Europe." Hitler's demands, in their present form, were "absolutely and unconditionally" unacceptable to Czechoslovakia. Against these new "cruel" demands the Prague government felt bound to make its "utmost resistance," and it relied on the two Western powers, "whose wishes we have followed, much against our own judgment, to stand by us in our hour of trial."⁷⁷

In the afternoon of September 25, before the arrival in London of the French Ministers, Mr. Chamberlain asked the Czechoslovak government whether, if he proposed an international conference attended by Germany, Czechoslovakia and other powers to consider the Anglo-French plan and the best method of bringing it into operation, Czechoslovakia would be prepared to take part in this new effort to save peace. M. Masaryk, in a note of September 26, stated that Czechoslovakia was ready to participate in such a conference, hoped that it would have an opportunity to "make representations about the many unworkable features" of the Anglo-French proposals, and asked for "definite binding guarantees that no unexpected action of an aggressive nature would take place during the negotiations and that the Czechoslovak defense system would remain intact during that period."⁷⁸

Events now followed each other with dizzying rapidity. The French Ministers, who had arrived in London on Sunday evening, continued their conversations with the British Cabinet Monday morning, September 26, when they were joined by General Gamelin, who later conferred with Sir Thomas Inskip, Minister for the Coordination of Defense, and General Lord Gort, Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Mr. Chamberlain, with the full approval of the French Ministers—who returned to Paris Monday afternoon—decided to make a personal appeal to Chancellor Hitler, who was to speak that night at the Berlin *Sportpalast*.⁷⁹ Sir Horace Wilson flew to Berlin, where he arrived

77. "Letter handed by the Czechoslovak Minister to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, on September 25, 1938," *Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia, September 25, 1938*, cited, p. 16.

78. "Letter from the Czechoslovak Minister in London to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, September 26, 1938," *ibid.*, p. 18.

79. "From Our Diplomatic Correspondent," *The Times*, September 27, 1938.

before four o'clock that afternoon, and delivered Mr. Chamberlain's note to Hitler. The British Prime Minister declared that there could be no question of Germany "finding it impossible to have the clear rights of Germans in Czechoslovakia accepted by way of negotiation," and asked the Führer to agree to a German-Czechoslovak conference in the presence of a British representative regarding the method of handing over Sudeten territory. "Surely," said Mr. Chamberlain, "the tragic consequences of a conflict ought not to be incurred over differences in method."⁸⁰ Earlier in the day Hitler had received President Roosevelt's message, dispatched on September 25 to Germany, Czechoslovakia, Britain and France—but not to Italy or the Soviet Union. In this message Mr. Roosevelt expressed the conviction "that all people under the threat of war today pray that peace may be made before, rather than after, war." No problem, he said, was so difficult or so pressing for solution "that it cannot be justly solved by the resort to reason rather than by the resort to force." On behalf of the American people and "for the sake of humanity everywhere," Mr. Roosevelt appealed to the interested countries not to break off negotiations, "looking to a peaceful, fair, and constructive settlement of the questions at issue."⁸¹

In his *Sportpalast* speech Monday night, September 26, Hitler insisted on maintenance of the October 1 deadline, but did not indicate the specific measures with which he intended to meet Czechoslovak resistance to his demands, thus leaving a margin, however narrow, for further negotiations. He thanked Mr. Chamberlain for his peace efforts; reiterated that, once the Sudeten problem was solved, Germany had "no more territorial problems in Europe"; that, when Czechoslovakia had come to terms with its other minorities, he would be ready to guarantee it; and that he had invited the British Legion to police plebiscite areas. He declared, however, that so far as the Sudeten issue was concerned, his patience was at an end; and that war or peace was in the hands of President Benes, who "will either accept this offer now and give the Germans their freedom at last, or we shall go and fetch this freedom."⁸²

In an apparent effort to forestall any irrevocable declaration by Hitler at the *Sportpalast*, "it was authoritatively stated" in London on Monday night

80. "Letter from the Prime Minister to the Reichschancellor," September 26, 1938, *Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia, September 1938*, cited, p. 19.

81. United States, State Department, *Press Releases*, October 1, 1938.

82. English text in *The Times* and *New York Times*, September 27, 1938.

that, "if in spite of all efforts made by the British Prime Minister a German attack is made upon Czechoslovakia the immediate result must be that France will be bound to come to her assistance, and Great Britain and Russia will certainly stand by France."⁸³ This statement, in which, at the eleventh hour, Britain accepted the commitment France had long asked it to undertake, was received with great suspicion by the French press, which raised doubts regarding its authenticity, pointing out the use of suspect phrases such as "it was authoritatively stated" and "Russia" instead of "U.S.S.R." French Foreign Office spokesmen, when questioned about the British statement, declined to confirm it—thus raising the question, in the minds of some observers, whether M. Bonnet was more disturbed than relieved by Britain's sudden determination to adopt a firm stand.⁸⁴

Early Tuesday morning, September 27, Mr. Chamberlain issued a statement in which he thanked Hitler for references to his peace efforts in the *Sportpalast* speech, and said he could not abandon those efforts "since it seems to me incredible that the peoples of Europe who do not want war with one another should be plunged into a bloody struggle over a question on which agreement has already been largely obtained." The Chancellor, it was evident, had "no faith that the promises made will be carried out." To reassure him, Mr. Chamberlain declared that the British government regarded itself "as morally responsible for seeing that the promises are carried out fairly and fully, and we are prepared to undertake that they shall be so carried out with all reasonable promptitude, provided that the German government will agree to the settlement of terms and conditions of transfer by discussion and not by force."⁸⁵ This statement was not published in Germany.

That same day Sir Horace Wilson returned to London with a note from Hitler replying to Mr.

83. *The Times*, September 27, 1938. This statement was apparently issued without previous consultation between the British Foreign Office and M. Maisky, Soviet Ambassador in London. Immediately after Godesberg, however, Lord De La Warr, British delegate to the League Assembly, had conferred with M. Litvinov in Geneva.

84. "Quand les Fausses Nouvelles deviennent vraies," *L'Europe Nouvelle Documentaire*, supplément to *L'Europe Nouvelle*, October 8, 1938, p. IV; also Paul Drailière, "Le Sabotage de l'Entente," *L'Europe Nouvelle*, October 8, 1938, p. 1083. Fabre-Luce contends that the September 26 statement was drafted by Sir Robert Vansittart, whom he describes as "chief of the war party in the Foreign Office," and approved by Lord Halifax, and was to that extent authentic, but that it did not represent the point of view of the British government—presumably Mr. Chamberlain. *Histoire Secrète de la Conciliation de Munich*, cited, p. 76. In his speech of October 4, 1938 in the Chamber of Deputies, M. Daladier confirmed the authenticity of the British statement.

85. *The Times*, September 28, 1938.

Chamberlain's message of September 26. In this note the Führer rejected the arguments advanced by Czechoslovakia on September 25, and declared that immediate occupation by German troops of the areas to be ceded by Prague was an indispensable security measure; otherwise, the Czech government "would be completely in a position to drag out the negotiations on any point they liked, and thus to delay the final settlement." After everything that had passed, Hitler said he could not place any confidence in assurances received from Prague. Countering Czechoslovakia's arguments, he asserted that, after cession of the Sudeten territory, Czechoslovakia "would constitute a healthier, more unified economic organism than before." Prague, in his opinion, was only using his proposal for German occupation "to mobilize those forces in other countries, in particular in England and France, from which they hope to receive unreserved support for their aim and thus to achieve the possibility of a general warlike conflagration." He left it to Mr. Chamberlain's judgment whether, in view of these facts, the British Prime Minister should continue his efforts "to spoil such manoeuvres and bring the government in Prague to reason at the very last hour."⁸⁶

Meanwhile, on Sunday, September 25, on a train near Schio, Mussolini had conferred with an envoy from Hitler whose name has not been revealed.⁸⁷ On the following day, September 26, at 7:30 p.m.—just before Hitler's *Sportpalast* speech—Bernardo Attolico, Italian Ambassador in Berlin, was informed that the German Chancellor had decided not to wait until October 1, and to mobilize on Wednesday, September 28, at 2 p.m.⁸⁸ At that time Mussolini, having completed his tour of the Venetian provinces, was on his way from Verona to Rome, which he reached late that evening. When he received news of Hitler's decision, he immediately ordered partial mobilization of Italian armed forces, which began on September 27. The army recalled 300,000 men, bringing up its total to 550,000; two army corps stationed in Libya were placed on a war footing; the garrisons on the islands of Pantelleria, Elba and Dodecanesus were strengthened; the navy and air force were made ready for action.⁸⁹ This mobilization—which, according to some observers, was begun at Hitler's

86. "Letter from the Prime Minister to the Reichschancellor," September 27, 1938, *Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia*, September 1938, cited, p. 21.

87. Speech of Count Ciano, Italian Foreign Minister, in the Chamber of Deputies, November 30, 1938. *Corriere della Sera*, December 1, 1938.

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid.*

orders against the wishes of the Italian King and Crown Prince—was carried out with such secrecy that foreign correspondents were not aware of its extent.⁹⁰

At Mussolini's suggestion, the two governments also decided to hold a conference regarding political and military collaboration in case of war. This conference was to have taken place in Munich at noon on September 29—exactly the time and place subsequently set by Hitler for the four-power conference which sealed the fate of Czechoslovakia. Count Ciano and Herr von Ribbentrop were to have discussed the political aspects of the situation, while Colonel General Wilhelm Keitel, head of the Supreme Command, for Germany, and General Alberto Pariani, Under-Secretary for War, and General Giuseppe Valle, Under-Secretary for Aviation, for Italy, were to have canvassed military plans.⁹¹ It would thus appear that, after Godesberg, Hitler and, at his instance, Mussolini, had begun to consider the possibility of a general war.

In Britain defensive units of the Auxiliary Air Force had been called up Monday night, and on Tuesday the fleet—which had been engaged in manoeuvres north of Scotland since early September—was mobilized “as a purely precautionary measure.” Once more, as in the case of the British statement of September 26 regarding Anglo-Soviet assistance to France, sections of the French press tried to minimize the significance of the mobilization by declaring that this measure had been taken three weeks earlier—confusing mobilization with naval manoeuvres.⁹² These developments were followed by Mr. Chamberlain's broadcast in the evening of September 27, in which the Prime Minister said it seemed impossible “that a quarrel which has already been settled in principle should be the subject of war.” He declared that he found Hitler's attitude “unreasonable,” refused to give up hope for peace, but added he saw nothing further that he could “usefully do in the way of mediation.” In conclusion, he made a statement of policy directed specially to the British Empire:

“However much we may sympathize with a small nation confronted by a big and powerful neighbor, we cannot in all circumstances undertake to involve the whole British Empire in war simply on her account. If we have to fight it must be on larger issues than

90. The London *Times*, for instance, reported that some reservists, largely carabinieri (who perform the duties of military police), and specialists, had been called to the colors, but that no steps had been taken toward general mobilization.

91. Speech of Count Ciano in the Chamber of Députés, November 30, 1938, cited.

92. “Quand les Fausses Nouvelles deviennent vraies,” *L'Europe Nouvelle Documentaire*, cited, p. V.

that. I am myself a man of peace to the depths of my soul. Armed conflict between nations is a nightmare to me; but if I were convinced that any nation had made up its mind to dominate the world by fear of its force, I should feel that it must be resisted. Under such a domination life for people who believe in liberty would not be worth living; but war is a fearful thing, and we must be very clear, before we embark on it, that it is really the great issues that are at stake, and that the call to risk everything in their defense, when all the consequences are weighed, is irresistible.”⁹³

Following Mr. Chamberlain's broadcast, the British Broadcasting Company adopted the unusual procedure of first reading in German part of President Roosevelt's message to Hitler, following this with German and Italian translations of the Prime Minister's speech. It was hoped that the German public, kept in ignorance of diplomatic moves abroad, might thus gain an inkling of the situation.

During his conversations with Sir Horace Wilson, Hitler had indicated that if Czechoslovakia did not accept the Godesberg memorandum by 2 p.m. Wednesday, September 28, German troops—which had marched in an unending stream through Berlin Tuesday night—might advance against Czechoslovakia on Thursday morning.⁹⁴ Although Hitler, in his *Sportpalast* speech, had seemed to leave room for further negotiations, he showed an unrelenting attitude in his answer of September 27 to President Roosevelt's message. After rehearsing Germany's grievances against the Versailles Treaty and Czechoslovakia, Hitler repeated that the decision “whether it wants peace or war” rested with the Prague government, renouncing all responsibility on behalf of the German people and its leaders should further developments, contrary to all his efforts, actually lead to the outbreak of hostilities.⁹⁵ Absence of information regarding the effects of the Godesberg memorandum on French and British public opinion left the German people in the bewildered belief that, if war came, Germany would only have to fight Czechoslovakia, and that the entire world opposed President Benes, whom Hitler had repeatedly singled out for violent contumely. There is little doubt that the German people would have fought had war come. But the prevailing mood, except among young Nazi firebrands, was one of anxious desire for peace, and of apathy toward the Sudeten question. Even blood-curdling tales of alleged Czech atrocities in the Sudeten territory brought no spontaneous expression of anti-Czech sentiment or war hysteria.

93. *The Times*, September 28, 1938.

94. Dispatch from Berlin, *ibid.*, September 28, 1938.

95. State Department, *Press Releases*, October 1, 1938, p. 221.

Fear in Europe and the United States that Hitler might take the irrevocable step of ordering a general mobilization on Wednesday afternoon caused the various interested governments to make a number of simultaneous, but independent, moves to avert resort to force. Shortly after ten o'clock Tuesday night, September 27, President Roosevelt sent a second appeal, addressed to Hitler alone, urging that negotiations be continued "without interruption until a fair and constructive solution has been reached." Nothing, said the President, stood in the way of widening the scope of these negotiations "into a conference of all the nations directly interested in the present controversy"—such a meeting to be held immediately in some neutral spot in Europe. Mr. Roosevelt declared that, should Hitler agree to a peaceful solution, he was convinced that hundreds of millions throughout the world would recognize his action "as an outstanding historic service to all humanity." The United States assumed no obligations in the conduct of the negotiations, but recognized its "responsibilities as a part of a world of neighbors."⁹⁶

On September 28 Mr. Chamberlain sent a personal message to Hitler, answering his note of September 27, delivered by Sir Horace Wilson. The Prime Minister assured Hitler that he could obtain "all essentials without war and without delay," and offered to go to Berlin at once to discuss with Hitler and representatives of France, Italy and Czechoslovakia arrangements for transfer of the Sudeten territory. He reiterated his pledge of September 27 that Britain would "see that promises are carried out fairly and fully and forthwith," and refused to believe that Hitler would take the responsibility of starting a world war "which may end civilization for the sake of a few days' delay in settling this long-standing problem."⁹⁷

At the same time, Mr. Chamberlain sent a personal message to Mussolini, informing *Il Duce* that he had addressed a "last appeal" to Hitler requesting him to abstain from using force to settle the Sudeten problem. He expressed the hope that Mussolini would inform Hitler that he was willing to be represented at the five-power conference suggested by the British Prime Minister, and urge him to agree to a proposal "which will keep all our peoples out of war."⁹⁸

Mr. Chamberlain's action coincided with similar

moves by M. Bonnet and President Roosevelt. At 2 a.m. on September 28 news of the Chamberlain message to Mussolini was communicated to M. Bonnet by Sir Eric Phipps, British Ambassador to Paris. M. Bonnet sent a telegram to M. Corbin, French Ambassador in London, instructing him to ask Lord Halifax to urge Mussolini's intervention with a view to immediate negotiations.⁹⁹ At the same time, M. Bonnet instructed M. François-Poncet, French Ambassador in Berlin, to ask for a personal interview with Hitler the next morning. And at 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday, September 28, Mr. William Phillips, American Ambassador to Rome, delivered to the Italian Foreign Office a personal message from President Roosevelt to *Il Duce* urging continuance of negotiations, which was apparently sent without previous knowledge of similar action by Mr. Chamberlain and M. Bonnet.

Half an hour later that morning Lord Perth, British Ambassador to Rome, called on Count Ciano and, on instructions from London—which preceded receipt of Chamberlain's personal message to *Il Duce*—asked that Mussolini intervene with Hitler to deter military action against Czechoslovakia pending another attempt at conciliation. Mussolini, both relieved and pleased at this opportunity to act as mediator, personally telephoned Bernardo Attolico, Italian Ambassador in Berlin, giving him the following instructions: "Go at once to the Führer and, making it clear first of all that I shall be with him whatever happens, tell him to postpone the beginning of operations for twenty-four hours." At that moment Hitler was in conference with M. François-Poncet, who had obtained an appointment at 11:15 a.m. and was suggesting further negotiations. Hitler did not reject these suggestions, but promised to give a reply in writing.¹⁰⁰ After talking with Attolico, Hitler decided to postpone general mobilization for twenty-four hours. This news was immediately communicated by Count Ciano to Lord Perth who, on returning to the British Embassy, found instructions to deliver the personal message regarding a five-power conference sent that morning by Mr. Chamberlain to Mussolini. Lord Perth had another interview with Count Ciano at noon, and Mussolini once more telephoned to Signor Attolico. About two o'clock that afternoon Hitler telephoned Mussolini, inviting him to a conference at Munich the next day, and informing him that similar invitations had been extended to Mr. Chamberlain and

96. State Department, *Press Releases*, October 1, 1938, p. 224.

97. "Personal Message sent by the Prime Minister to the Reichs chancellor on September 28, 1938," *Further Documents respecting Czechoslovakia*, Miscellaneous No. 8 (1938), Cmd. 5848 (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1938), p. 1.

98. "Personal Message sent by the Prime Minister to Signor Mussolini on September 28, 1938," *ibid.*, p. 1.

99. Speech of M. Daladier, October 4, 1938, cited; Fabre-Luce, *Histoire Secrète de la Conciliation de Munich*, cited, p. 88.

100. Speech of M. Daladier, October 4, 1938, cited.

M. Daladier. Mussolini, accompanied by Count Ciano, left for Munich at 6 p.m.¹⁰¹

When the British Parliament, summarily recalled on September 26, assembled at 2:50 p.m. on Wednesday, September 28, to hear Mr. Chamberlain's report on his conversations with Hitler, it was still feared that war might prove unavoidable. Shortly before the House assembled, the British government had received from Lord Perth the news that Mussolini had obtained postponement of German mobilization for twenty-four hours, and in view of these circumstances the Opposition had consented to a swift temporary adjournment of debate.¹⁰² Mr. Chamberlain, in an atmosphere of utmost tension, recited the course of the Czechoslovak crisis since May 1938, leading to a situation which, he said, had had "no parallel since 1914." According to an authoritative British version, Mr. Chamberlain, when he began to speak, did not know "what kind of a message might be coming from Berlin, and a very different climax to the speech had been prepared, including a further appeal for peace."¹⁰³ This version has been disputed by observers who believe that Mr. Chamberlain, throughout his negotiations with Hitler, knew that there was no danger of war, and had merely created an atmosphere of unbearable suspense and anxiety to prepare the public in Britain, France and throughout the world for acceptance of Hitler's terms. In the absence of further evidence, which could be supplied only by the memoirs of the chief participants in the Czechoslovak crisis, this contention cannot be definitively established. Whether through sheer coincidence or superlative timing on Hitler's part, the invitation to the Munich conference was handed to Lord Halifax, who was sitting in the gallery with other members of the House of Lords, and to Lord Dun-glass, the Prime Minister's Private Secretary, just as Mr. Chamberlain was nearing the end of his speech. Immediately after announcing that Hitler, at Mussolini's request, had postponed mobilization, Mr. Chamberlain, having scanned the Foreign Office message, said: "But that is not all! I have something further to say to the House yet." He read Hitler's Munich invitation and, amid wild cheers of relief and rejoicing from all parts of the House, added: "I need not say what my answer will be!" At his request, debate was adjourned until the following Monday. Early on Thursday morning, September 29—the day when war had been expected to start—Mr. Chamberlain left on his third flight to Germany, where he was joined by M. Daladier, who had also greeted this last-minute reprieve with profound relief.

THE MUNICH ACCORD

The four-power accord concluded shortly after midnight on September 30¹⁰⁴ closely followed the terms of the Godesberg memorandum,¹⁰⁵ with only minor modifications concerning the time-limit set for evacuation and an added provision for exchange of populations.

GODESBERG

1. Evacuated territory to be occupied by German troops on October 1.

2. Military, commercial and traffic plants not to be destroyed or rendered unusable. No foodstuffs, goods, cattle, raw materials, etc., to be removed from the evacuated territory.

3. German government to permit a plebiscite in certain areas by November 25, this plebiscite to be carried out under the control of an international commission. All persons residing in areas in question on October 28, 1918 or born there prior to this date to be eligible to vote.

4. An authoritative German-Czech commission to be set up to settle all further details.

5. No provision about exchange of populations.

MUNICH

1. Evacuated territory to be occupied by German troops in four stages, beginning October 1 and ending October 10.

2. Existing installations not to be destroyed; Czechoslovak government to be held responsible for carrying out the evacuation without damage to said installations.

3. An international commission to determine by end of November the territories in which a plebiscite is to be held. This commission will fix the conditions of the plebiscite, taking as a basis those of the Saar plebiscite of 1935, which limited voting to persons residing in the Saar at the time of the signature of the Versailles Treaty—June 28, 1919.¹⁰⁶

4. Final determination of frontiers to be carried out by the international commission, which is entitled to recommend to the four signatory powers "in certain exceptional cases minor modifications in the strictly ethnographical determination of the zones which are to be transferred without plebiscite."

5. There will be a right of option into and out of the transferred territories, the option to be exercised within six months from the date of this agreement.

6. The Czechoslovak government to discharge at once all Sudeten Germans serving in its military forces or police, and to liberate all political prisoners of the German race.

In an annex to the accord, the French and British governments declared that they stood by their September 19 offer regarding international guarantee of Czechoslovakia's new boundaries against unprovoked aggression. The annex added: "When the question of the Polish and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia has been settled, Germany and Italy for their part will give a guarantee to Czechoslovakia."¹⁰⁷ In a supplementary declaration the four powers stated that if the problems of the Polish and Hungarian minorities had not been settled within three months by agreement between the respective governments, they would be discussed at another four-power conference.¹⁰⁸

On September 30, in addition, Mr. Chamberlain and Chancellor Hitler signed a declaration in which they described the Anglo-German naval agreement of 1935 as "symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again"; expressed their determination to settle all questions concerning their two countries by the method of consultation; and declared they would continue their efforts to remove "possible sources of difference and thus to contribute to assure the peace of Europe."¹⁰⁹

France, which feared that the Anglo-German declaration might break up its alliance with Britain, signed a similar pact with Germany on December 6.¹¹⁰ In this pact the French and German governments expressed the conviction that "pacific and good neighborly relations" between their two countries constitute one of the essential elements in the consolidation of the European situation and the maintenance of general peace; declared that "no question of a territorial order remains in suspense" between them; "solemnly" recognized their common frontier as definitive; and resolved, "under the reservation of their special relations with third party powers, to remain in contact on all questions

^{101.} This account of Mussolini's intervention is based on Count Ciano's speech in the Chamber of Deputies, November 30, 1938, cited; a dispatch from Rome, *The Times*, September 29, 1938; and "Hitler and *Il Duce* talked twice on critical day of Czech Crisis," *New York Times*, November 1, 1938.

^{102.} *The Times*, September 29, 1938.

^{103.} *Ibid.*

^{104.} Agreement concluded at Munich on September 29, 1938, Great Britain, *Further Documents respecting Czechoslovakia*, cited, p. 3.

^{105.} Rudolf Kircher, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, October 2, 1938; Dr. Theodor Seibert, "16 Tage Weltgeschichte," *Völkischer Beobachter*, October 16, 1938.

^{106.} Subsequently the international commission, over Czech

6. The Czechoslovak government, within four weeks, to release from its military and police forces any Sudeten Germans who may wish to be released, and to release Sudeten Germans serving terms of imprisonment for political offenses.

interesting their two countries and to consult together mutually in the event that any ulterior evolution of these questions might risk leading to international difficulties." The Franco-German pact applied only to France's land frontier with Germany and did not cover its possessions in North Africa, which at that very moment were being challenged by Italy. It must also be recalled that the Franco-British alliance operates only in case of a German attack on continental France, and would not necessarily apply to Italian attack on French possessions overseas.

THE AFTERMATH

In its practical application the Munich accord proved even more drastic than in its original terms. Germany acquired one-fifth of Czechoslovakia's territory, containing its fortifications, the major portion of its industries, and a minority of at least 800,000 Czechs. The international commission, composed of a German Foreign Office representative and the French, British and Italian Ambassadors in Berlin, unquestioningly accepted the terms dictated by Germany to a prostrate Czechoslovakia. Contrary to the Munich accord, which provided for plebiscites in certain areas, the commission decided on October 13 to hold no plebiscites; and on November 21 approved a final delimitation treaty under which Germany obtained additional territory not included in the four zones demarcated at Munich. According to two other treaties signed on the same day, Germany obtained an extraterritorial corridor through Czechoslovakia, in which it will build a military highway controlled by German police and customs guards; and the two countries agreed jointly to dig an Oder-Danube canal, supplementing the Rhine-Main-Danube canal already being constructed by the Third Reich. Stripped of its fortifications and principal industries, its system of communications severed by the German corridor, Czechoslovakia has become an economic appendage of Nazi Germany.

protests, determined the "preponderantly German" areas according to the status of October 28, 1918 (as provided in the Godesberg memorandum). Since no census had been taken in Austria-Hungary since 1910, the international commission used 1910, not 1918, figures.

^{107.} Agreement concluded at Munich on September 29, 1938, Great Britain, *Further Documents respecting Czechoslovakia*, cited, p. 4.

^{108.} *Ibid.*, p. 5.

^{109.} *The Times*, October 1, 1938.

^{110.} *New York Times*, December 7, 1938.

The Anglo-French guarantee of Czechoslovakia's new frontiers, which was to compensate Prague for its sacrifices in the cause of peace, proved wholly illusory. The Western powers contented themselves with perfunctory protests when Poland and Hungary, backed by Mussolini, claimed their share of the Czechoslovak spoils. These claims were settled not by another four-power conference, as provided at Munich, but by an award rendered by German and Italian representatives at Vienna on November 2. The Vienna award, in turn, represented Hitler's determination to balk Warsaw, Budapest and Rome plans for a common frontier between Poland and Hungary, which might have served as a new line of defense against German expansion. Territorial concessions, contrary to the expectations of Mr. Chamberlain and his supporters in other countries, failed to appease Nazi extremists, who merely accelerated their drive for totalitarianism by the expropriation and suppression of racial and religious minorities.

In passing judgment on the Munich accord, it must be admitted that another world war would not have solved the age-old conflict between Czechs and Germans. It would not have brought democracy to Germany, even if it had destroyed Nazism. It would not have ended Nazi dreams of eastward expansion, which Hitler inherited from pre-war Pan-Germans and the German General Staff. Some observers, however, feel that war was not the only alternative to the Munich settlement. After Godesberg, when public opinion throughout the world reacted against German intransigence, France and Britain were in a position, not to demand maintenance of the Czechoslovak *status quo*—that had become impossible after Berchtesgaden—but to insist that the settlement should be negotiated on the basis of their proposals of September 19. Instead, the French and British statesmen gave Hitler a free hand in Eastern Europe. In adopting this course, they were influenced not merely by the desire of their peoples to avoid war, but by their belief that Germany enjoyed an overwhelming superiority in air armaments, and that a general war could only lead to social revolution, which would spell the doom of capitalism.

Did Munich avert a general war? Germany, having won one of the cheapest victories in history, has become the dominant power on the European continent. Annexation of Sudetenland and subjection of what remains of Czechoslovakia give the Reich unobstructed access to the foodstuffs and raw materials of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Other countries menaced by German or Hungarian territorial ambitions—Poland, Rumania and Yugo-

slavia—are faced with the alternative of either submitting to Nazi control or resisting Germany, with the knowledge that resistance is futile unless supported by France and Britain.

The Western powers, for the time being, seem resigned to German hegemony east of the Rhine, and have turned from continental affairs to consolidation of their overseas empires. These empires, however, are menaced by Italo-German agitation among Moslem nationalists, and peculiarly vulnerable to that doctrine of self-determination which Chamberlain and Daladier accepted yesterday for Czechoslovakia, but which may be invoked tomorrow by Arabs in Palestine or Italians in Tunis. Russia, isolated from Western Europe, may join a coalition of non-German states, led by Poland, Hungary and Rumania, in opposing Nazi penetration east of Prague. Alternatively, the Soviet government, as in the early post-war years, may turn its attention to the Far East and reach an agreement with Germany, thus diverting the Nazi drive from the Ukraine to the Persian Gulf, where it would challenge British interests. Should that occur, Germany, strengthened by the resources of Eastern Europe, would be able to turn against the West, free from its pre-war fear of having to fight on two fronts.

The most striking fact emerging from the Munich aftermath is that Nazi Germany, which had previously concentrated its attack on France, Russia and Czechoslovakia—regarded as obstacles to its eastward drive—has now shifted it to Britain and the United States, which block its expansion outside Europe, leaving to Mussolini the task of driving a wedge between France and Britain by his demand for Tunis, Corsica, Nice and Savoy. In its bid for world power, Nazi Germany, like the empire of the Hohenzollerns, threatens to clash with the British Empire and the United States in Africa and Latin America—not necessarily by military force, but by that combination of propaganda, threats and economic penetration which enabled Germany to obtain Austria and Sudetenland without firing a shot. If that happens, the Munich accord, far from having inaugurated an era of appeasement, will merely have set the stage for a major conflict between two imperialist systems which, under the slogan of democracy versus fascism (replacing the 1914 slogan of democracy versus autocracy), would repeat the pattern of the World War. In such a struggle the United States, in spite of its desire for neutrality and isolation, apparently intends to play a decisive part by consolidating the countries of the Western Hemisphere against Nazi penetration.